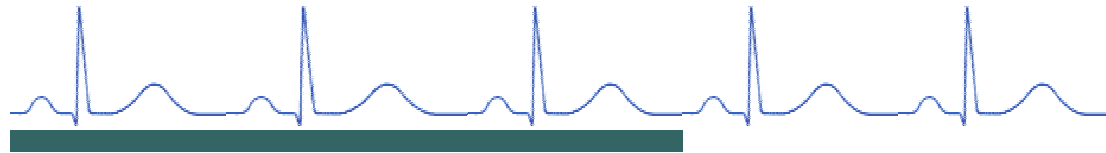


Keeping the Beat

Key Findings of the
2001 Kentucky Worksite Survey



Kentucky Department for Public Health
Chronic Disease Prevention and Control Branch

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In 2001, the Kentucky Department for Public Health, in cooperation with the University of Kentucky Department for Preventive Medicine and Environmental Health, conducted a survey on worksite policies and environments that impact cardiovascular health of employees. 317 worksites of 100+ employees responded to the survey.

The major components of cardiovascular disease (CVD), heart disease and stroke, are responsible for approximately 950,000 deaths each year in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The major risk factors for CVD are physical inactivity, tobacco smoking, poor nutrition, and high blood pressure and cholesterol. Worksites have been identified as one of four areas people can be impacted, with schools, communities, and health care systems being the others.

The following results of the survey offer a glimpse at what worksites in Kentucky are doing to address cardiovascular disease through their policies and environments and where there are opportunities for improvements.

Heart Healthy Physical Activity

Physical inactivity is one of the major risk factors of cardiovascular disease. In fact, Kentucky is the most sedentary state in the U.S. , with 41% of adults not getting any physical activity other than regular job duties, according to 2000 CDC data.

Considering most people spend the majority of their waking hours at work, worksites are in a unique position to promote and encourage physical activity among their employees. For most, a safe environment is a factor in doing physical activity. Worksites in Kentucky are to be commended, as most in this survey offer safe places for employees to walk, either indoors, outdoors, or both. Some other reasonable activities employers can promote, and some currently do, are listed in Table I.

Table 1

Employer Activities to Encourage Physical Activity	
Activity	Number of Worksites
Signs encouraging use of stairs, not elevator*	10 (3%)
Subsidize membership in health club, etc.	76 (24%)
Employer-sponsored sports	92 (29%)
Prizes for meeting an exercise or fitness goal	2 (<1%)
*Only in worksites reporting more than one story	

Despite the fact most worksites offer safe places to walk, they are not likely to encourage or allow physical activity. While it may not seem like it's the "job" of the employer to promote physical activity, doing so helps to create a positive and healthy worksite environment. Some helpful strategies for employers wanting to improve promotion of physical activity are: (1) encourage and allow employees to use break time for physical activity; (2) allow employees "on the clock" time or a little extra time during breaks for walking; (3) encourage walking clubs; and (4) provide space for physical activity. Placement of signs around the worksite promoting physical activity is also a low-cost initiative that can help create a workplace culture of wellness.

Smoking

Smoking continues to be the # 1 preventable cause of death and disease in the U.S. and Kentucky leads the nation in smoking rates (30.5%) according to the CDC 2000 data. The good news is that more than half of all the worksites surveyed are totally smoke-free, and most worksites surveyed have policies limiting smoking to certain areas (See Table 2). Interestingly, the majority of workers in smoke-free worksites support the policy (63%) with a high rate of compliance (83%) with the policy.

Table 2

Smoking Policy for Various Areas at Work		
Smoking Policy	Indoor Public Areas*	Work Areas*
Not allowed	194 (61%)	251 (79%)
Allowed in some areas	107 (34%)	57 (18%)
Allowed in all areas	8 (2.5%)	3 (1%)
No official policy	6 (2%)	4 (1.3%)
Don't know	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)
*Number of worksites		

Smoke-free policies are beneficial for the health of all employees by reducing exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke and may also encourage smokers to quit. This can benefit the employer by reducing health care costs associated with smoking tobacco. 177 of the 317 worksites surveyed responded that they did not discourage smoking by the methods listed in Table 3 (See below). Table 3 shows what employers are doing to discourage smoking.

Table 3

Ways that Employers Discourage Cigarette Smoking	
Action	Number of Worksites
Pharmaco-therapies covered by health plan	82 (26%)
Pharmaco-therapies for smoking cessation (not through health plan)	38 (12%)
Discount insurance premiums in non-smokers	33 (10%)
Cash or monetary rewards	16 (5%)
Community programs or contests	15 (4.7%)
Non-monetary awards (e.g. prizes, recognition)	2 (0.6%)
Competitions	1 (0.3%)

Some tips for worksites that want to go smoke-free are: (1) provide literature to employees on smoking dangers, including cardiovascular risks; (2) provide smoking cessation opportunities by partnering with a local health department; (3) do not allow the sale of tobacco products on worksite premises; and (4) implement a no smoking policy on the worksite premises.

Heart Healthy Nutrition

Kentucky is ranked second worse in overweight prevalence in the U.S. According to a 2000 CDC report, 61% of Kentucky residents are overweight. In fact, a RAND* (see description on pg. 7) researcher concluded in a report published in the journal *Health Affairs* that obesity contributes to higher cost increases for health care services and medications than do either smoking or problem drinking. These are some reasons why worksites should be concerned about their nutrition policies.

Making wise nutritional choices is vital to being heart healthy. When one thinks of vending machines, images of snack cakes and candy bars come to mind. While these items may be the norm, heart healthy options are available. According to the survey, most worksites reported offering healthy snack choices in vending machines (Table 4) despite the fact most did not have a specific policy requiring healthy choices (Table 5). Not surprisingly, most worksites also offer facilities and appliances where employees can eat and prepare food. Strategies for improvement of nutrition at the worksite consist of wellness offerings, including nutrition/cholesterol education, weight management and nutrition/obesity management.

Table 4

Worksite Healthy Food Offerings in Vending Machines	
Offering	Number of Worksites
Low-fat snacks or fruit	266 (88%)
Bottled water	209 (70%)
100% fruit juices	177 (59%)
Low-fat milk	119 (40%)

Table 5

Policies for Offering Healthy Food Choices at the Worksite	
There is a policy that healthy food choices should be available...	Number of Worksites
In the cafeteria	23 (7%)
In vending machines	24 (8%)
At meetings	5 (2%)
At company-sponsored events	6 (2%)
No Policy	249 (79%)

High Blood Pressure and Cholesterol

High blood pressure and cholesterol are main contributors to CVD. Known as the “silent killer”, high blood pressure (or hypertension) affects 1 in 5 Kentuckians, according to the Kentucky State of the Heart, 2000 (KSH 2000). Many cases of high blood pressure can be controlled by getting regular physical activity, eating a lower fat diet, and quitting smoking. In some cases, blood pressure is difficult to control with diet and physical activity and may require medication to control. A doctor should be consulted for the best course of action.

High cholesterol is also a major risk factor for CVD. Thirty percent of Kentuckians have high blood cholesterol (KSH 2000), with the primary cause being a diet loaded with saturated fat. The best way to control and reduce high blood cholesterol is to reduce the amount of saturated fat in the diet and eat more fruits and vegetables.

What can the worksite do? First, offer more Health Risk Appraisals, including screenings for blood pressure and cholesterol. Table 6 lists the types of screenings offered and those recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). These screenings can alert an individual to potential health risks, particularly CVD, and are often the first steps for the employee to become proactive in a wellness program.

Table 6

Screening Tests for Risk Factors for CVD Offered at Worksites	
Type of Screening	Number of Worksites
Blood Pressure Checks (recommended)	111 (35%)
Cholesterol screening (recommended)	70 (22%)
Blood test to measure blood sugar (recommended)	64 (20%)
Body fat or health body weight screening (recommended)	47 (15%)
Periodic physical exams	36 (11%)
Diet/nutrition evaluation	23 (7%)
Physical fitness tests	20 (6%)

The last three screenings in Table 6 (periodic physical exams, diet/nutrition evaluation, and physical fitness) are not recommended by the USPSTF.

Second, offer more health education opportunities and wellness programs. See Table 7 for the types of worksite programs and policies regarding wellness that are currently being applied, and some you may want to implement.

Table 7

Worksite Programs and Policies related to Employee Wellness	
Types of Wellness Offerings	Number of Worksites
At least one wellness (Health Promotion) activity	257 (81%)
A wellness program	125 (39%)
Any health education	192 (61%)
Any screening tests	155 (49%)
Health education to families	74 (23%)
Any policies regarding having healthy food choices	42 (13%)
Any facilities to increase physical activity	69 (22%)
Any policies limiting smoking on-site	309 (97%)

Conclusion

Evidence shows that worksites which adopt wellness programs increase productivity, decrease absenteeism, create a healthier workforce and therefore reduce personnel costs and increase savings. The survey revealed Kentucky worksites are on par with worksites nationwide for having policies and environments that promote cardiovascular health. Motivation for worksites to implement physical activity, nutrition or smoking related programs can be found no further than the bottom-line. In the long run, these initiatives could help ease the public health burden and rising health care costs brought on by chronic diseases, notably cardiovascular disease. To highlight some initiatives that are currently being done by some worksites, and could be offered by others, are:

- ✓ Adopting a smoke-free worksite policy.
- ✓ Implementing an employee-based wellness committee.
- ✓ Allowing extra break time for employees to walk or exercise.
- ✓ Working with the local health department to offer smoking cessation opportunities for employees.
- ✓ Providing incentives, such as fitness club memberships or discounts.
- ✓ Creating physical activity space for employees.
- ✓ Putting up signs encouraging physical activity, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator.
- ✓ Improving vending machine offerings to include more reduced-fat, heart healthy choices.
- ✓ Label heart healthy foods in the cafeteria.
- ✓ Increasing educational opportunities on benefits of physical activity, proper nutrition and quitting smoking by working with the local health department.

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*RAND is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decision making through research and analysis. RAND is a contraction of the term research and development.